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AMERICAN PRESS EDITORIAL

Keep voicing opinion on La. redistricting

Southwest Louisiana residents spoke with near unanimity Tuesday to a joint state legislative committee tasked with developing redistricting plans for the state.

Keeping the current 7th Congressional District intact as much as possible and not separating Lake Charles and Lafayette was the common theme running through the presentations.

The House and Senate Governmental Affairs committees are currently on a statewide listening tour, gathering input from Louisiana residents on redistricting made necessary by the 2010 Census.

The committees will make recommendations regarding boundaries for congressional districts, state Senate and House districts, the Public Service Commission, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Courts of Appeal and the state Supreme Court. Ultimately, the state Legislature will have to approve them.

The congressional districts will be reshaped this year because Louisiana is dropping from seven to six congressmen caused by anemic population growth over the past 10 years.

What congressional district Southwest Louisiana will fall into was the subject du jour Tuesday at the Lake Charles Civic Center.

It's clear that local residents want to continue to be joined at the hip with Lafayette when it comes to congressional representation.

The two cities have, at times in the past, been at odds, particularly when McNeese State University and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette have met in athletics. However, folks in both communities have come to realize that they have much in common and can benefit from combining forces.

That sentiment was evidenced Tuesday when Bruce Conque, a member of the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, appealed to the joint committee to keep the two cities in the same congressional district.

Several speakers also asked the committee to keep Calcasieu and Cameron parishes together, since the Calcasieu Ship Channel, the lifeline to the Port of Lake Charles, the 11th largest port in the nation, and the massive petro-chemical complex west of the river, traverses through both parishes.

One plan that calls for a single coastal district stretching from Cameron Parish to St. Bernard Parish would separate Calcasieu and Cameron.

How important is the message? Consider that Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach watched Tuesday's meeting via computer while on vacation in Indiana and spoke passionately as the final speaker about retaining the 7th Congressional boundaries.

Tuesday's hearing should only be the beginning, not the end, for area residents.

A similar hearing in Houma on Monday drew 250. The plea of those residents was not to split Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes into separate congressional districts as some plans have suggested.

There are nine cities on the committee's tour and you can bet residents are going to lobby for what they believe is in the best interests of their respective areas.

Comments and questions can be submitted via Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and other social media sites. Information about the social media sites is available at [http://house.louisiana.gov/H_Re districting2011/](http://house.louisiana.gov/H_Re%20districting2011/) which also includes up-to-date information on all aspects of the redistricting process.

Public comments submitted in any format, i.e. e-mail and old-fashioned letters, will be taken into consideration as plans are drafted. And comments shouldn't be directed just to committee members since all 144 state lawmakers will eventually vote on the plans.

The special session of the Legislature to adopt redistricting plans will open on March 20 and must end no later than April 13.

The plans will then be submitted to the U.S. Justice Department for approval. The department has at least 60 days to either approve or reject the plan.

It behooves our area's residents to continue to deliver their message. Let your voice be heard loud and clear.